

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Department of Health**  
**Environmental Health Administration**

Office of the Senior Deputy Director



**August 25, 2005**

**To: School Administrators**  
**Owners and Operators of Childcare Facilities**

**Re: When Drinking Water Faucets and Kitchen Sinks Have Not Been Used for Many Weeks, Remember to Allow the Water to Run Before Use for Drinking or Cooking**

Dear School Administrator or Childcare Facility Owner/Operator:

With summer coming to an end and many people returning to schools, day care centers, and buildings that may have been closed for the summer, the Department of Health would like to remind you to flush the pipes in your buildings to replace stagnant water with fresh drinking water. Flushing involves opening up the taps and letting fresh water run to clear the standing water in pipes and outlets.

The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DCWASA) collects over 200 samples each month from all over the District; and this summer, these tests continue to indicate that water delivered to customers is well within the requirements set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Your fresh tap water delivered to homes, schools, and offices has been monitored and treated for bacteria and contaminants.

In homes, schools, and offices that have been closed during the summer, especially during the hot summer months, bacteria can multiply rapidly in unused and low use water lines, attaching to the inside surfaces of pipes. In addition, certain bacteria can increase the level of nitrite in the water through a process known as nitrification, which in turn increases the potential for bacterial growth.

Regular flushing will replace stagnant water with fresh drinking water, which is less likely to contain bacteria, nitrite, or other contaminants. Flushing will also help to eliminate the odors, stale taste, and discoloration of stagnant water.

As part of your facility's routine maintenance program and good public health practices, the Department of Health recommends that before using water that has been sitting for a long period of time for drinking or cooking, that you open the taps and allow the water to run for at least twenty (20) minutes. If the water is discolored, you should first allow the water to run clear. Once the water is clear, allow it to run for an additional twenty (20) minutes. Flushing the toilets and bathing is a good measure to get fresh water circulating throughout the piping. Be sure to keep an eye on the running water to avoid spills and water damage.

For large school buildings, DCWASA recommends flushing the pipes in each building for eight hours before the start of school, by opening the faucets at the end of the pipes in the buildings and then rotating to other sinks and faucets. If you provide infant care, you may also wish to test the drinking water for nitrite and chlorine residual levels, as infants are at greater risk from nitrite and bacteria. You may obtain lists of laboratories certified to test drinking water on the following website: <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/labs/index.html>.

Guidelines on measures that can be taken to ensure safe drinking water are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800-426-4791) and on the EPA website: [www.epa.gov/safewater/hfacts.html](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/hfacts.html).

For more information concerning this letter, please contact the Department of Health at (202) 442-9195. You may also contact Johnnie Hemphill at DCWASA at (202) 787-2609.

Sincerely,

/ s /

**MARIE SANSONE**

Interim Senior Deputy Director